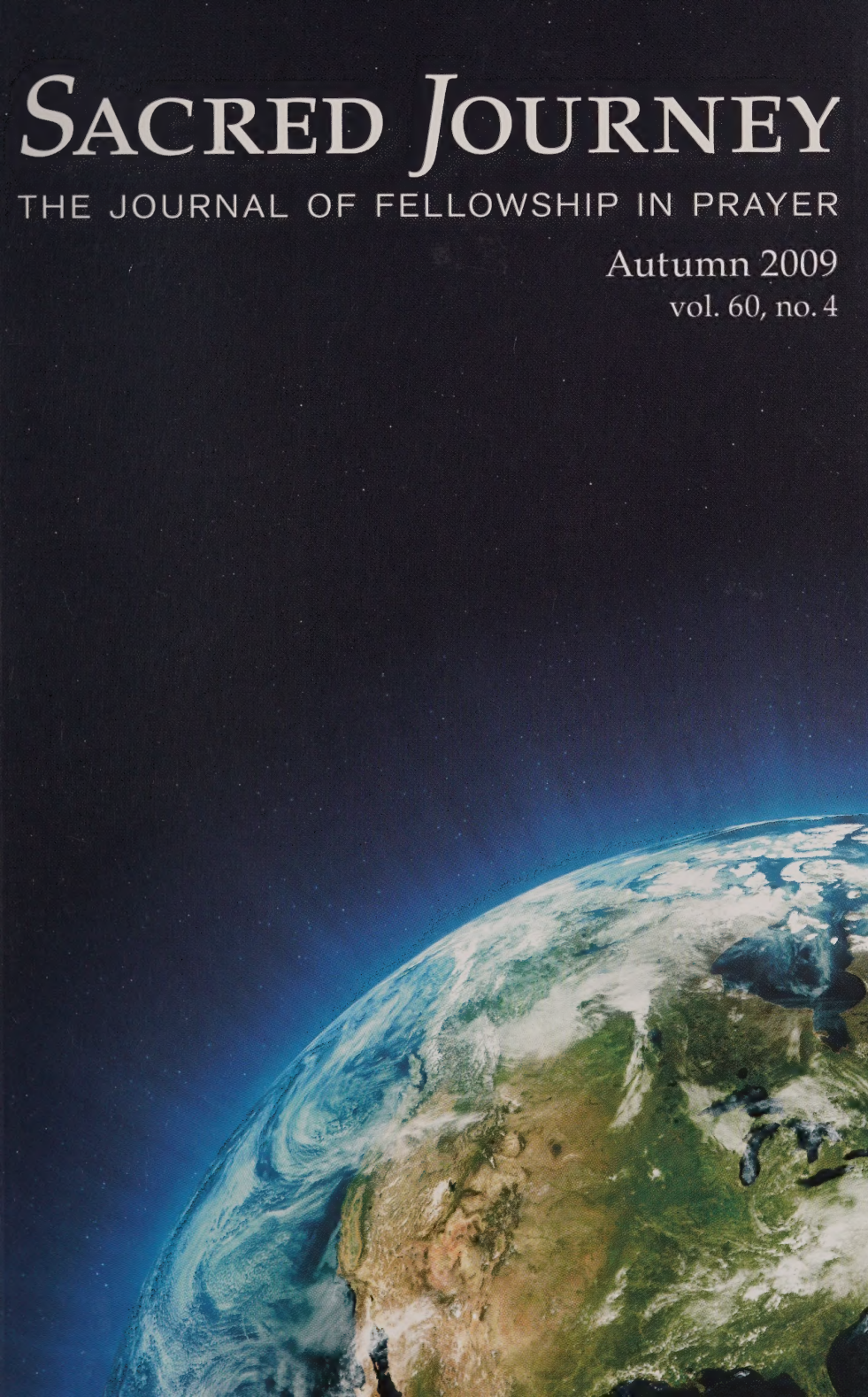
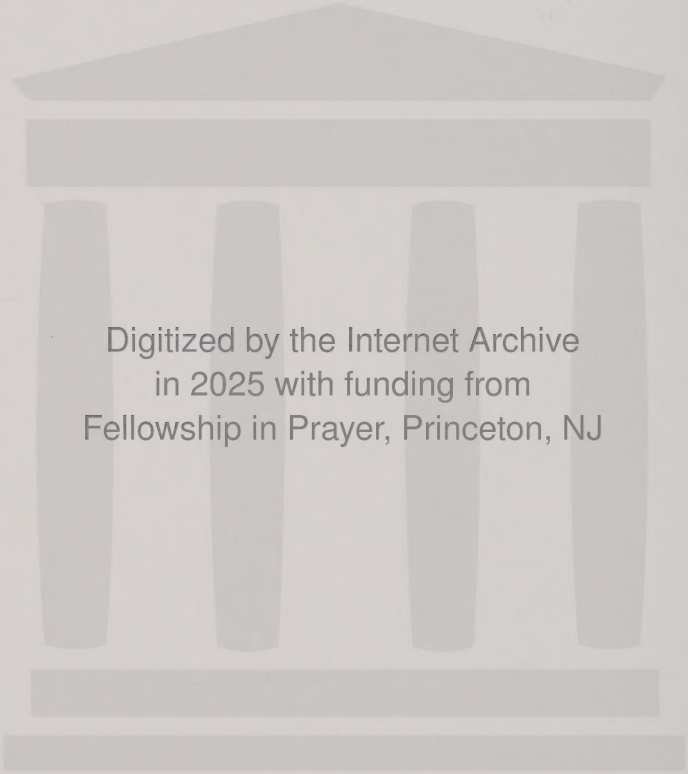
SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Autumn 2009
vol. 60, no. 4

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SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Fellowship in Prayer

encourages and supports
a spiritual orientation to life,

promotes the practice
of prayer, meditation,
and service to others,

and helps bring about
a deeper spirit of unity
among humankind.

SACRED JOURNEY
THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER
Autumn 2009, vol. 60, no. 4

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Submissions
We welcome submissions of articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience and practice, religious faith or similar topics, as well as prayers and poetry. We look for writing that expresses an individual's personal experience while also conveying a deeper message of universal appeal. Writing must be accessible to people of all traditions. Please include a brief biography and full contact information: name, address, phone numbers and email. Articles should not exceed 1500 words and should be submitted to the editor by email: submissions@sacredjourney.org. If necessary, they may be mailed.

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Contents

Autumn 2009, vol. 60, no. 4

4
A MESSAGE FROM FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER
Just Wondering
JANET M. HAAG

6
COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY
An Interview with Thomas Berry

11
The World of Wonder
THOMAS BERRY

20
ILLUMINATIONS

22
PRAYERS

28
AN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
Healing Sacred Earth
LAWRENCE TROSTER
OZGUR DOGRU
KATHLEEN DEIGNAN

46
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
Celebrating an Earth-Friendly Holiday Season

49
Ben's Bar Mitzvah
LINDA ALBERT

52
Of Faith and Flowers
COLETTE HANLON

54
Faith in the Corporate Wilderness
WESTINA MATTHEWS

57
Where is the Gift?
CAROLYN FOOTE EDELMANN

64
POETRY

67
A REFLECTION
Tribute to a "Weed"
ROBERT O'ROURKE

68
Deconstructing God
MIRIAM THERESE MACGILLIS

71
REVIEWS

72
ENDPIECE
Four Seasons
GUNILLA NORRIS

Just Wondering

JANET M. HAAG

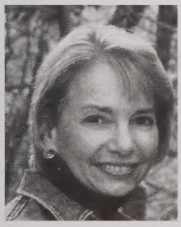
Just wondering . . . if you are looking to tap the reservoir of peace in your own heart or communicate with your God, where do you go? What is it you do? Personally, my first choice is to head to the beach where I can listen to the pounding surf and watch white-capped waves wash endlessly up on the shore. In this setting, I instantly become more attuned to the rhythm of life. Standing before the vast ocean with its mysterious depths, I feel as infinitesimal as a grain of sand. For many of us, it is through such an experience with nature that we find our way to communion with the Sacred.

Father Thomas Berry, esteemed cultural historian and eco-theologian, reminds us that a sense of wonder is among the most important of spiritual values. We are rooted in a world of incredible natural beauty, but how often do we actually find ourselves standing in awe of it? Perhaps we should make it an essential part of our daily prayer. We are, after all, embodied spirits, inextricably linked to the natural world. We need to embrace our place in the universe and right our relationship with the earth if the spark of creation is to be passed to future generations. According to Berry, "whatever fosters the inherent beauty in nature is good; what does harm to it is not. Good religion helps us to interpret the deeper meaning of the natural world; good science, education, economics and politics preserve it."

I am reminded of an inspirational story adapted from *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eiseley in which a young man is observed repeatedly picking up the starfish deposited on the beach, and tossing them back into the receding tide. When asked what he is doing, the young man replies, "Throwing starfish into the ocean. If I don't do it, they will die." He is challenged by the practicality of a fellow beachgoer who remarks, "There are hundreds of starfish

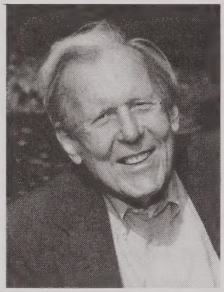
and miles of beach, so you can't possibly make a difference." Undaunted, the young man continues with his task. Tossing yet another starfish into the ocean, he muses, "Well, I made a difference to *that* one!" Perhaps this is the consciousness necessary to begin healing ourselves and restoring balance to the planet.

Hopefully, this particular issue of *Sacred Journey* will help you renew your sense of enchantment with nature even as it highlights the environmental crisis before us. The challenge of our day may well be to re-claim a cosmological vision—wonder at the universe and acceptance of the unique role that is ours as humans within the Earth community—to nurture life in all its forms and to care for the planet we inhabit together. SJ



Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship in Prayer.

An Interview with Thomas Berry



Lou Niznik

Father Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest and renowned eco-theologian who passed away in June, was a longtime friend and advisor to Fellowship in Prayer. He was one of the first to identify the Earth crisis as fundamentally a spiritual crisis and to suggest the human species needs to redefine itself as a species among species and an integral part of a sacred universe. A little more than a year ago, Thomas Keevey, another friend of Fellowship in Prayer, visited with Tom Berry at his home in Greensboro, North Carolina where he graciously held a brief conversation with Keevey on our behalf. Following is the text of that final interview with Tom Berry along with an excerpt from his new book, The Sacred Universe: Earth Spirituality and Religion in the Twenty-First Century, *edited and introduced by Mary Evelyn Tucker (2009).*

Tom Keevey: What is prayer in the context of the earth's spirituality?

Thomas Berry: First of all, I would ask this question differently; I would ask "What is prayer in terms of the earth's spirituality in the 21st century?" The 20th and 21st centuries are totally different realities. You could say that prayer in the 21st century has to proceed from the tragic elements of what happened in the preceding century. So prayer in this century needs to be a prayer of compassion and renewal, for the reconstitution of earth-human relations. This prayer has to begin with compassionate concern for the earth in its basic constitution, its living and non-living forms. This prayer has to be a prayer both

of thanksgiving for the beauty and wonders the earth has given us over the centuries and a prayer that promises its renewal. AMEN!

Is this what you mean by a prayer of compassion?

My prayer has consistently been a prayer of concern for the planet Earth. In this century, my prayer is particularly directed for our children. As early as the 1960s when I became aware of the tragedy happening to the planet Earth, I became concerned about how this was going to affect our children. I have always been concerned about children, the education of children and how to prepare them for the enormous responsibility that is falling on their shoulders. I can't say I had a comprehensive understanding of the devastation of the planet and our inability to deal with it right from the beginning, but for a long time I had a certain brooding awareness of what was happening.

Would you say you were experiencing a sense of foreboding?

Yes, definitely foreboding and a sense of urgency about the need for a creative response, not simply to accept what was happening but to get on with a creative vision for responding to a disintegrating situation.

You are in the process of writing a book, what is the focus of this new work?

The intention of this new work is to restore a sense of the planet Earth as revelatory. Ever since the 15th century when the printing press was invented and Bibles became widely available to people—the Bible has been the focus for Christian thought, the daily point of reference for living one's faith. But the wonder and the majesty of the universe is the primary source of the religious mentality and this is confirmed in the Bible.

For example, Psalm 104 talks about the relationship between God and creation. This is further confirmed by St. Francis of Assisi in his wonderful poem on the universe, "The Canticle of All Creatures." We find in both writings, the different approach to creation that is needed at this time. We need something more than ecology—which is the mechanics of a response—we certainly need ecology but by itself, it is not **The Answer**. I don't know what **The Answer** is. An answer to the present situation has to be comprised of a number of different approaches and I think the religious approach has been missing in terms of laying the foundation for earth-human relations. It is not exactly only a religious approach; it is a human approach. Our experience of the universe is primarily one that provides a deep sense of human fulfillment, although it can give rise to religion. In tracing the universe back to its source, we discover creative divinity, emergent spirit.

Why do you think a religious approach has been missing?

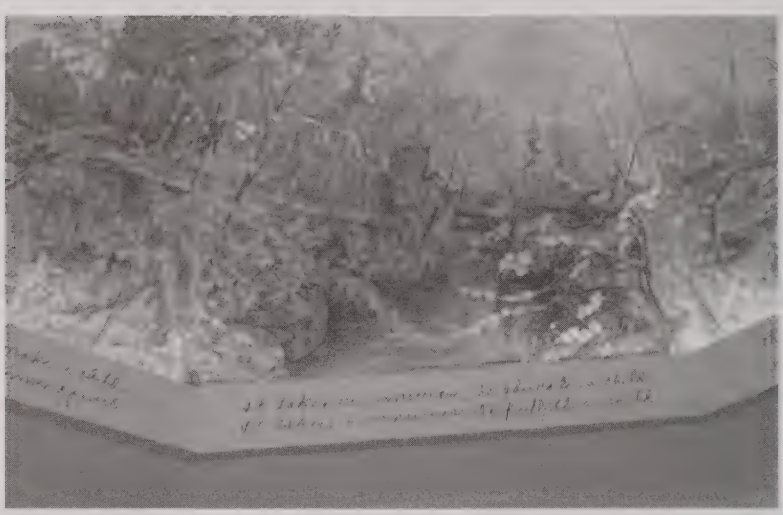
I think the Christian tradition feels a little suspicious about concern for planet Earth, lest these concerns become a religion, a manifestation somehow that the earth is divine. In reality, traditions from the earliest times suggest the earth is the primary teacher of religion. What I hope to do in my book is to restore this awareness, not to diminish the importance of redemption-oriented religion but to insist this kind of religious emphasis is not exactly the answer to our situation today. Our emphasis needs to be redirected from the world beyond the human condition toward life and the earth. Often when religious people talk about the earth and what is happening, they talk simply in terms of ethics and morality. It is true that we have moral obligations to the earth but such an approach by itself is inadequate. What I am saying is that we need to cultivate deeper human sensitivities with regard to the earth, recognizing that if we lose the earth, we will not just lose

physical and economic resources; we will lose our capacity for thinking. We will experience a profound psychic and spiritual loss because we learn about reality and all of our basic values from the earth. A deep human sensitivity to the earth is particularly important to deepening any religious experience. We have to become integral to the living system within which we reside to discover where God is especially present.

It has been said that each of us is a unique creation, an image of God—as such, what would you like your imprint on this world, your legacy, to be?

Well, quite simply, I would like my legacy to be a restoration of integrity to the earthly wonders I experienced when I was a child. My parents were very good about letting their children be free to explore and experience the world. They didn't overdo taking care of us by watching over us too much. In fact, when my mother was once asked, "How do you care for your children?" She responded, "With a lot of healthy neglect!" I grew up being allowed to roam the woods and meadows around my home so I was able to experience the rich variety of nature's beauties, its flowers and birds. In this setting, I got to really know and appreciate the grandeur of the natural world. I have carried this wonder world in my unconscious ever since. All my thinking evolved from it, sensitizing me to what is happening to planet Earth. It helped me develop what I want my legacy to be—to restore for the children of the future the opportunity to experience fully the wonder and beauty of nature, the numinous presence of the universe.

Thank you for taking your time to share your insights with us.



On the rotunda of the Kathleen Clay Edwards Library in Greensboro, North Carolina—written in Father Thomas Berry's own handwriting and accompanied by beautiful images of the natural world, is the summation of his legacy.

It Takes A Universe

The child awakens to a universe.
The mind of the child to a world of wonder
Imagination to a world of beauty
Emotions to a world of intimacy.

It takes a universe to make a child
both in outer form and inner spirit.
It takes a universe to educate a child.
It takes a universe to fulfill a child.

And the first obligation of each generation in relation to the next generation is to bring these two together so that the child is fulfilled in the universe and the universe is fulfilled in the child.

The World of Wonder

THOMAS BERRY

What do you see? What do you see when you look up at the sky at night at the blazing stars against the midnight heavens? What do you see when the dawn breaks over the eastern horizon? What are your thoughts in the fading days of summer as the birds depart on their southward journey, or in the autumn when the leaves turn brown and are blown away? What are your thoughts when you look out over the ocean in the evening? What do you see?

Many earlier peoples saw in these natural phenomena a world beyond ephemeral appearance, an abiding world, a world imaged forth in the wonders of the sun and clouds by day and the stars and planets by night, a world that enfolded the human in some profound manner. This other world was guardian, teacher, healer—the source from which humans were born, nourished protected, guided and the destiny to which we returned.

Above all, this world provided the psychic power we humans needed in our moments of crisis. Together with the visible world and the cosmic world, the human world formed a meaningful threefold community of existence. This was most clearly expressed in Confucian thought, where the human was seen as part of a triad with Heaven and Earth. This cosmic world consisted of powers that were dealt with as persons in relationship with the human world. Rituals were established whereby humans could communicate with one another and with the earthly and cosmological powers. Together these formed a single integral community—a universe.

Humans positioned themselves at the center of this universe. Because humans have understood that the universe is centered everywhere, this personal centering could occur anywhere. For example, the native peoples of North America offered the sacred pipe to the powers of the four directions to establish themselves

in a sacred space where they entered into a conscious presence with these powers. They would consult the powers for guidance in the hunt, strength in wartime, healing in time of illness, support in decision making. We see this awareness of a relationship between the human and the powers of the universe expressed in other cultures as well. In India, China, Greece, Egypt, and Rome, pillars were established to delineate a sacred center, which provided a point of reference for human affairs and bound Heaven and Earth together.

There were other rituals whereby human communities validated themselves by seasonal acknowledgement of the various powers of the universe. This is still evident with the Iroquois

> There is now a single issue before us: survival . . . in a world of fulfillment . . . in a world of meaning.

autumn thanksgiving ceremony, where the sun, the Earth, the winds, the waters, the trees, and the animals each in turn received expressions of personal gratitude for those gifts that made life possible. Clearly, these peoples see something different from what we see.

We have lost our connection to this other deeper reality of things. Consequently, we now find ourselves on a devastated continent where nothing is holy, nothing is sacred. We no longer have a world of inherent value, no world of wonder, no untouched, unspoiled, unused world. We think we have understood everything. But we have not. We have used everything. By "developing" the planet, we have been reducing Earth to a new type of barrenness. Scientists are telling us that we are in the midst of the sixth extinction period in Earth's history. No such extinctions of living forms have occurred since the extinction of the dinosaurs some sixty-five million years ago.

There is now a single issue before us: survival. Not merely physical survival, but survival in a world of fulfillment, survival in a living world, where the violets bloom in the springtime. Where the stars shine down in all their mystery, survival in a world of meaning. All other issues dwindle in significance—whether in law, governance, religion, education, economics, medicine, science, or the arts. These are all in disarray because we told ourselves: We know! We understand! We see! In reality what we see, as did our ancestors on this land, is a continent available for exploitation.

When we first arrived on this continent some four centuries ago, we also saw land where we could escape the monarchial governments of Europe and their world of royalty and subservience. Here before us was a land of abundance, a land where we could own property to use as we wished. As we became free from being ruled over, we became rulers over everything else. We saw the white pine forests of New England, trees six feet in diameter, as forests ready to be transformed into lumber. We saw meadowlands for cultivation and rivers full of countless fish. We saw a continent awaiting exploitation by the chosen people of the world.

When we first arrived as settlers, we saw ourselves as the most religious of peoples, as the most free in our political traditions, the most learned in our universities, the most competent in our technologies and the most prepared to exploit every economic advantage. We saw ourselves as a divine blessing for this continent. In reality, we were a predator people on an innocent continent.

When we think of America's sense of "manifest destiny," we might wish that some sage advice regarding our true role had been given to those Europeans who first arrived on these shores. We might wish that some guidance in becoming a life-enhancing species had been offered during these past four centuries. When we first arrived on the shores of this continent, we had a unique opportunity to adjust ourselves and the entire course of Western civilization to a more integral presence to this continent.

Instead, we followed the advice of the Enlightenment philosophers, who urged the control of nature: Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who saw human labor as the only way to give value to the land; René Descartes (1596-1650); John Locke (1632-1704), who promoted the separation of the conscious self from the world of matter. In 1776, when we proclaimed our Declaration of Independence, we took the advice of Adam Smith's (1723-1790) *Inquiry Into Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, a book of enormous influence in the world of economics from then until now. Our political independence provided an ideal context for economic dominance over the natural world.

As heirs to the biblical tradition, we believed that the planet belonged to us. We never understood that this continent had its own laws that needed to be obeyed and its own revelatory experience that needed to be understood. We have only recently considered the great community of life here. We still do not feel that we should obey the primordial laws governing this continent, that we should revere every living creature—from the lowliest insect to the great eagle in the sky. We fail to recognize our obligation to bow before the majesty of the mountains and rivers, the forests, the grasslands, the deserts, the coastlands.

The indigenous peoples of this continent tried to teach us the value of the land, but unfortunately we could not understand them, blinded as we were by our dream of manifest destiny. Instead we were scandalized, because they insisted on living simply rather than working industriously. We desired to teach them our ways, never thinking that they could teach us theirs. Although we constantly depended on the peoples living here to guide us in establishing our settlements, we never saw ourselves as entering into a sacred land, a sacred space. We never experienced this land as they did—as a living presence not primarily to be used but to be revered and communed with.

René Descartes taught us that there was no living principle in the singing of the wood thrush or the loping gait of the wolf or the mother bear cuddling her young. There was no living principle

in the peregrine falcon as it soared through the vast spaces of the heavens. There was nothing to be communed with, nothing to be revered. The honeybee was only a mechanism that gathered nectar in the flower and transformed it into honey for the sustenance of the hive and the maple tree only a means of delivering sap. In the words of a renowned scientist: "For all our imagination, fecundity, and power, we are no more than communities of bacteria, modular manifestations of the nucleated cell."

In order to counter reductionistic and mechanistic views of the universe such as this, we need to recover our vision, our ability to see. In the opening paragraph of *The Human Phenomenon*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) tells us: "One could say that the whole of life lies in seeing. That is probably why the history of the living world can be reduced to the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes....See or perish. This is the situation imposed on every element of the universe by the mysterious gift of existence." We need to begin to see the whole of this land. To see this continent, we might imagine ourselves in the great central valley that lies between the Appalachian Mountains to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. Here we would be amazed at the vast Mississippi River, which flows down through this valley and then on into the immense gulf that borders the southern shores of this continent. This massive flow of water, including its tributary the Missouri, flowing in from the northwest, constitutes one of the greatest river systems on the planet, draining almost the entire continent, from New York and the Appalachian Mountains in the east to Montana and the Rocky Mountains in the west.

This region includes the Great Plains, the tall grasslands that extend from Indiana to the Mississippi River, to the short grasslands that begin across the river and extend to the mountains. This is a territory to be honored in some special manner. The region to the west of the river has what are among the deepest and most fertile soils on the planet. Soils that elsewhere are only inches in depth here are several feet deep, soils formed of the debris washed down from the mountains over the long centuries.

A large human population depends on this region. Such precious soil is a gift to be carefully tended. This center of commercial wheat, and later corn production, began in New York in the early nineteenth century and extended westward until now it can be located in those Kansas fields of grain that extend beyond the horizon.

When we stand in the Mississippi basin, we can turn westward and experience the mystery, adventure, and promise of this continent; we can turn eastward and feel its history, political dominance, and merciful concerns. Westward are the soaring redwoods, the sequoia, the Douglas fir, the lodgepole pine, eastward are the oaks, the beech, the sycamore, the maple, the spruce, the tulip poplar, the hemlock. Together, these bear witness to the wonder of the continent and the all-encompassing sea.

We might also go to the desert, or high in the mountains, or to the seashores, where we might really see, perhaps for the first time, the dawn appear in the eastern sky—its first faint purple glow spreading over the horizon, then the slow emergence of the great golden sphere. In the evening we might see the flaming sunset in the west. We might see the stars come down from the distant heavens and present themselves almost within reach of our arms if we stood on tiptoe.

So too, we might begin to view the change of the seasons: the springtime awakening of the land as the daisies bloom in the meadows and the dogwood tree puts forth its frail white blossoms. We might experience the terrifying moments when summer storms break over the horizon and lightening streaks across the sky, the moments when darkness envelopes us in the deep woodlands, or when we experience the world about us as a vast array of powers asserting themselves. When we view all this, we might begin to imagine our way into the future.

Concerning this future we might make two observations. First, the planet Earth is a onetime project. There is no real second chance. Much can be healed because the planet has extensive, albeit limited, powers of recovery. The North American continent

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will never again be what it once was. The manner in which we have devastated the continent has never before occurred. In prior extinctions, the land itself remained capable of transformations, but these are now much more difficult to effect. Second, we have so intruded ourselves and debilitated the continent in its primordial powers that it can no longer proceed simply on its own. We must be involved in the future of the continent in some comprehensive manner.

It is clear that there will be little development of life here in the future if we do not protect and foster the living forms of this continent. To do this, a change must occur deep in our souls. We need our technologies, but this is beyond technology. Our technologies have betrayed us. This is a numinous venture, a work of the wilderness. We need a transformation such as the conservationist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) experienced when he saw the dying fire in the eyes of a wolf he had shot. From that time on, he began to see the devastation that we were bringing upon this continent. We need to awaken, as did Leopold, to the wilderness itself as a source of a new vitality for its own existence.

For it is the wild that is creative. As we are told by Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), "In Wilderness is the preservation of the world." The communion that comes through these experiences of the wild, where we sense something present and daunting, stunning in its beauty, is beyond comprehension in its reality, but it points to the holy, the sacred.

The universe is the supreme manifestation of the sacred. This notion is fundamental to establishing a cosmos, an intelligible manner of understanding the universe or even any part of the universe. That is why the story of the origin of things was experienced as a supremely nourishing principle, as a primordial maternal principle, or as the Great Mother, in the earliest phases of human consciousness. Some of the indigenous peoples of this country experience it as the Corn Mother or as Spider Woman. Those who revere the Corn Mother place an ear of corn with the infant in the cradle to provide for the soothing and security the infant needs to feel deep in its being. From the moment the infant emerges from the warmth and security of the womb into the chill and changing world of life, the ear of corn is a sacred presence, a blessing.

We must remember that it is not only the human world that is held securely in this sacred enfoldment but the entire planet. We need this security, this presence throughout our lives. The sacred is that which evokes the depths of wonder. We may know some things, but really we know only the shadow of things. We go to the sea at night and stand along the shore. We listen to the urgent roll of the waves reaching ever higher until they reach their limits and can go no farther, and then return to an inward peace until the moon calls again for their presence on these shores.

So it is with a fulfilling vision that we may attain—for a brief moment. Then it is gone, only to return again in the deepening awareness of a presence that holds all things together.

Excerpted from *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, And Religion In The Twenty-First Century.* Edited and with a Forward by Mary Evelyn Tucker. © 2009 Columbia University Press www.columbia.edu and used with permission.

SAVE THE DATE

PRAYER
AN ANSWER FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Fellowship in Prayer
60th Anniversary Conference

June 24–27, 2010

to be held on the Princeton University Campus

Opening Plenary

Accessing our Best Inner Resources for Service and Social Action
Meditations on Natural Wisdom and Compassion

John Makransky, ordained Tibetan Buddhist lama, professor of Buddhism and Comparative Theology at Boston College

Keynote

R. Gustav Niebuhr, associate professor in Religion & the Media, Syracuse University; author of *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*; former New York Times National Correspondent and Washington Post National Staff Writer

Multi-Faith Plenary

Joan Chittister OSB, author and international lecturer
Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Roshi Bernie Glassman, Zen master, founder and spiritual director of Zen Peacemakers
Daisy Khan, executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement

Moderated by **Father Edward Beck** CP, co-host of ABC's *Focus On Faith*

Workshop Leaders:
Rabia Terri Harris; Rabbi Justus Baird; Rev. Paul B. Raushenbush; Amy Rakusin & Phil Fraiesi; Lhaklong Sönam; Sohaib Sultan; Robert Jones; Rev. Becca Stevens; Laxmi Shah; Rahul Subramaniam & Shannon Mercer; Fr. Edward Beck; Miriam MacGillis OP; Rev. Michael Prewitt; Roshi Bernie Glassman; Jill & Tim Geoffrian; Rebecca Laird; Michael J. Christensen; John Tyler; Fr. Tom Ward; Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal; Robert Jones; Rev. Michael Pergola; Rose Mary Dougherty SSND. . .

For more information
www.fellowshipinprayer.org (special events)

The world is holy. We are holy. All life is holy. Daily prayers are delivered on the lips of breaking waves, the whisperings of grasses, the shimmering of leaves.

TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

When we heal the earth, we heal each other.

DAVID ORR

IF WE THINK OF OURSELVES AS COMING OUT OF THE EARTH, RATHER THAN HAVING BEEN THROWN IN HERE FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE, WE SEE THAT WE ARE THE EARTH; WE ARE THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE EARTH. THESE ARE THE EYES OF THE EARTH. AND THIS IS THE VOICE OF THE EARTH.

Joseph Campbell

The stronger the reverence for natural life,
the stronger grows also that for the spiritual life.

Albert Schweitzer

First thing in the morning,
before you meet or greet anyone,
remember to greet all of nature,
all visible and invisible creatures.
Say to them: "I am grateful for your work.
I love you and want to be in harmony with you!"
At this very moment, in response to your greeting,
all of nature will open to you
and send you energy for the entire day.

OMRAAM MIKHAEL AIVANHOV

If the earth were your body, you would be able to feel the many places where it is suffering. Every day, children and adults die because of the pollution of air and water. These things are related.

THICH NHAT HANH

Nature seems to hold no grudges, have no regrets, and does not suffer from angst about tomorrow. She is here in the moment—celebrating today.

Catherine Renzi

Water in a river remains pure because it is moving. When water becomes trapped, it dies. Therefore, water must constantly be circulated, moving, changing, flowing—this is what life is all about.

MASARU EMOTO

Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread within it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect.

Chief Seattle

He lives in wisdom, who sees himself in all and all in him.

BHAGAVAD GITA

In Praise of Creation

SANDRA MCCALL

Oh! Eternal Creator
Who relieves despondency into understanding,
Supercedes hope over desolation,
Turns rejection into wisdom.

Oh! Eternal Creator
We receive growth from understanding,
Healing from forgiveness,
Knowledge from inspiration,
In praise of these peerless truths, we are bonded.

Oh! Eternal Creator
We unite as caretakers of our dominion,
Of the macrocosm, of the eternity of souls.
We are secure in the covenant of compassion,
And in the promise of enduring mercy.

I listen . . . listen . . . listen to your song,
An everlasting presence in my life.

Sandra McCall is a classical pianist and the grandmother of thirteen who has been writing poetry for the past several years.

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This Blade of Grass

JACQUES DELLI

I stand before You in all my splendor.

What a Miracle I am.

I am not proud in myself, but am in awe of Your grace.

You broke the ground, infused the elements,
so that I may arise to such perfection.

How lush is my color. How fresh I smell.

You are so devoted to me. When I cry out in need of water,
You shower me gently.

You bath me with warmth that is so loving, an embrace that gives life.

In all the vastness of space, which is harsh to organic life,
you caress my soul, my consciousness, my being.

I am so wondrous in all of creation. So special, unique in time and space.

I have struggled to survive, one day at a time,
and You have sustained me in my fullness.

A Miracle to wonder, I am because of You.

I praise you—this blade of grass on this distant rock.

Jacques Delli Paoli serves on the Mission Council of the Presbyterian Church in Basking Ridge, NJ where he is a church elder and is studying to become a Stephen Minister. He has over twenty years in the financial services field and has traveled to Africa and Latin America for mission work. Jacques lives in Millington, New Jersey with his wife and two children.

Morning Prayer

SHARRAN WIND WALKER

Colorful, scented morning,
drop like iris petals on awakening;
like dew drops on a wild rose.
Quench my thirst for knowing;
calm the restless spirit within!

A walk through misty woods
lets me absorb this dawn's rising
inexorably taking me
by pathways seemingly forgotten
in a strange yet familiar land!

Feel the joyous harmony
of nature's infinite bounty
in every living organism.
The soul is set free in love
life's energy flows unhindered
through a rested, eager body!

The Universe hears my voice:
latent healing powers awakened
in the pounding of life's heart
symbolized in daily renewal!

Sharran Wind Walker resides in British Columbia. After a conscious decision to give up his car out of concern for the environment, he now either walks or bicycles to work and play. His keen environmental awareness is reflected in much of his poetry.

Blessings

HELEN PADWAY

Morning

One eye sneaks
out from under a heavy lid
peaks through the feathered rim
and encourages the other to follow.
One mind shakes off the night
and opens to the possibility
of the day like a lotus flower
unfolding petal by petal.
Coming to consciousness
finding legs, feet, arms
and lungs an inventory
of gratitude
for all working parts.

Noon

You are all here—
Krishna, Buddha,
Great Mother Spirit,
Allah, Jesus, Adonoi.
Fountains
of creativity—source
of our bounty
we praise you,
partake in your delights,
and thank you.

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Night

It is before the loose fetal
pose and crumpled blanket.
The moment when
we repose—the bones
connected to all the muscles,
nerves, arteries and veins
lie in straight serenity
and surrender to the night
in a grateful yawn of being.

Helen Padway regards writing poetry as both her freedom and her prison; freedom because it provides the opportunity to use language as she sees fit to express ideas, and a prison because she cannot stop playing with words, planning their positions on the page all the while hoping to communicate to the reader's mind and heart. She lives in Glendale, WI where she enjoys the company of her fourteen grandchildren.

Healing Sacred Earth

Fellowship in Prayer once again joined the Interfaith Dialog Center of Central Jersey in hosting Abraham's Table: An Interfaith Dialogue Luncheon on Healing Sacred Earth In the Abrahamic Traditions. In her introduction, moderator, Hillary Murray, noted, "We have only to look out our windows to see God's creativity vividly expressed in trees and flowers—a constant invitation to enjoy as well as to care for sacred Earth!"

Following are excerpts from the luncheon presentations.

. . . In Judasim

RABBI LAWRENCE TROSTER

It's a real pleasure to be here today and to share food with all of you. It is one of the quintessential ways in which human beings can express their peaceful intentions. As one anthropologist put it, "The etiquette of dining ensures the fact that we are eating the food and not each other."

I would like to talk about a concept in Judaism called *Tikkun Olam*, translated as repairing, healing, or fixing the Earth. *Tikkun Olam* is an old idea that has taken on a particularly modern perspective in the Jewish community and has become a synonym for social justice and social justice theology. Theologically it means that humans must take responsibility for creation and not rely on divine intervention. *Tikkun Olam* also conveys a certain optimism, suggesting that what we do in our daily lives will have an actual effect on ourselves, on others and on the entire order of creation. If however, *Tikkun Olam*

is about us being responsible for the repairing or restoring of creation then we must also accept that this repair of the Earth is necessary because it is broken. This notion of *Tikkun Olam* as the repair of brokenness in creation comes from a Kabbalistic or Jewish mystical concept that this brokenness actually occurred at the very moment of creation as an essential and inescapable part of God's creative process. However, the modern concept of *Tikkun Olam* assumes that creation was, as it says in Genesis 1:31, "very good," meaning perfectly ordered, sufficient, harmonious, and just right. We humans, created in the image of God, through the ill use of our God-given qualities, have broken creation, blurring the boundaries of the order God had given us. Therefore, it is our duty and our obligation now to try to repair it. Indeed when you look in the Hebrew Bible, there is the vision that sometime in the future that original harmony, symbolized by the Garden of Eden, will be restored (Isaiah 11). There are also various ideas about how this restoration is to come about.

I would like to look at *Tikkun Olam* from an environmental perspective. At this very moment the Earth is dying. Creation is dying. We human beings are literally turning it back into the primordial chaos out of which God first shaped the Earth. So how do we go about healing the Earth? The environmental movement here in the United States began in the 1960s with the publication of Rachel Carson's famous book, *Silent Spring*. Since then, there has been a great deal of effort at both the grassroots and national levels for passing legislation and creating policies to try and bring about better environmental sustainability.

Religious environmentalism is a little younger and really began only about forty years ago when the first theological papers on religious environmentalism were written. Is there a distinctive religious environmental theology? There is and a large body of eco-theology has been written. I must ask, however, how it has contributed to curing, healing the Earth? In one particular way, I believe that religious environmentalism

has offered a sense of hope that we can repair the Earth, we can make the future better. We really can bring about *Tikkun Olam*. I especially believe this is an essential element in all the Abrahamic faiths which ultimately are optimistic faiths. We believe the future can be better than the present.

One of the things we can learn through environmental education is how to bring healing into our personal relationships with the Earth. As much as we need to have the large policy discussions, we also have to deal with ourselves and how we as individuals relate to creation. Environmental educator Mitchell Thomashow, in his book *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*, (xiii, 12-13) defines ecological identity or environmental consciousness, as "how people perceive themselves in reference to nature—as living, breathing beings connected to the rhythms of the Earth, biogeochemical cycles, the grand, complex diversity of ecological systems." He said that "intrinsic to an ecological worldview is the ability to see an ecosystem as part of oneself. This knowledge is gained both through an understanding of scientific ecology and the ability to observe and internalize the interconnections and interdependence of all life." I take what he said very seriously. This relates not only to science education. It also applies to a spiritual perspective.

First of all, we have to have knowledge; this is the intellectual part of environmental spirituality. The Abrahamic faiths all have intellectual components to their spiritual traditions. There are things we must learn. One of our greatest thinkers in Judaism, Moses Maimonides, who lived in Egypt in the 12th and 13th centuries, said that when we look at God's creation we have to study it with all of the knowledge that is available to us at the time. Today, this is scientific knowledge. What do we learn from scientific knowledge? We learn we are part of an eco-system. We are not disconnected from the rest of life. The simplest form of life is connected to us by the genetic code, making all organisms on Earth relatives of one another. It is also essential for us to remember this interconnectedness continues through

the larger structures of ecosystems; we have in part created the environmental crisis because we have thought that we are separate from these processes. We have been living like we can do whatever we want to the Earth and there will be no adverse effects. Only other animals or species will be affected and if so, we are willing to pay that price.

We now know that this is not the case. We are part of the ecosystems around us through the air we breathe and the water we drink; we are part of a constant interchange with the Earth. We are literally "from the Earth." In Hebrew the word for humanity is *adam*. The second chapter of Genesis says that Adam came from

> If a person enjoys anything of this world without a blessing, it's like a sacrilegious act, like stealing sacrifices off the altar of God.

the Earth, which in Hebrew is *adamah*. The great Bible scholar E.A. Speiser once wrote that Adam should not be translated as "man" or even as "person" or "humanity," but as "earthling." And we literally are earthlings, of the Earth. This is the intellectual component of an eco-spirituality but there is also an experiential component that occurs when we take the knowledge that comes into us in a far deeper and more spiritual way—taking the interconnection and interdependence that Thomashow talks about and feeling it in our hearts.

Rachel Carson also wrote about this a long time ago. In addition to *Silent Spring*, she wrote several other books, including one called *The Sense of Wonder*. In it, she talks about how to imbue in children a sense of wonder about the natural world, or

rather how to help children keep their inborn sense of wonder. It is a sense that is evoked when we are out in the woods or are gardening in our backyards, see birds on a feeder, overlook a grand vista, or have the rare opportunity to gaze on the stars in the heavens. This deep sense of wonder is the spiritual heritage of every human being. Abraham Joshua Heschel, the great Jewish theologian, called it "radical amazement." He said while any act of perception or cognition has its object, a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality, not only to what we see but to the very act of seeing as well. We can be amazed at our ability to see. This sense of wonder and awe is at the heart of an environmental spirituality that can bring us all back to understanding how we must heal the Earth. I work for GreenFaith, an interfaith organization that has been around since 1992. We intentionally ask people in our adult education programs to talk about their deepest spiritual experiences. We have found that eighty percent of those experiences are rooted in the natural world. Again, it could be observing the grand vista or a morning walk in the garden through which people find the connection that provides spiritual nourishment.

So how do we try to evoke that sense of wonder every day? Zen Buddhists would say we have to cultivate mindfulness, watching and really understanding things, not just passing them by and taking them for granted. Mindfulness in the Jewish tradition is brought about through our series of blessings. We have a blessing for practically everything and new ones are being created constantly. The purpose of a blessing is to make us feel as if God is right there before us. We say blessings over our food, the events in our lives, the fulfillment of a religious commandment, over natural and human phenomenon. The most common Jewish blessing is recited at the beginning of a meal over bread. Bread is the symbol for the whole meal, so we say, "Blessed are you, Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." Now the phrase, "who brings forth bread from the earth," is actually a quote from Psalm 104, where it talks about

God's bounty on the Earth and how God allows bread to come from the earth. So right away, the origin of that phrase tells us that even though bread doesn't literally grow out of the earth, it is of the Earth and it is because of God that we can have that bread. There is a very interesting structure to the beginning of that blessing. It starts with a direct address to God, "Blessed are you," as if God is right in front of us. Then we name God, "Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe," and then it shifts into the third person to give God's epithet, "who brings forth bread from the earth." It is this simple blessing, said over the most basic food that is meant to give us pause so as not to move on to eating in a mindless way.

There's a famous passage in the Talmud (Berakhot 58a) that says if a person enjoys anything of this world without a blessing, it's like a sacrilegious act, like stealing sacrifices off the altar of God in Jerusalem's temple. A sense of mindfulness must be brought to every act, including our own biological functions. One of my favorite blessings is one that is said after you have finished in the bathroom. It reads "Praise you, Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who fashioned the human being with wisdom and created in the human many openings and cavities," literally, many holes and pipes, "it is obvious and known before your throne of glory but that if one of them were to be opened or one of them were to be closed, it would be impossible to survive and to stand

before you for even one hour. Praised are you Lord, healer of all flesh, who acts wondrously." Trust me, the older you get, the more you appreciate this blessing—that everything is indeed working right. There are many kinds of prayer—we ask God for things, we thank God for things—and there is the sense of wonder, praise and awe that comes through prayer. Jewish blessings are prayers that provide a sacred pause.

I would like to conclude with a wonderful piece written by Thich Nhat Hanh, a modern Buddhist master in the book *The Sun, My Heart* (90). He writes, "When we look at a chair we see the wood but we often fail to observe the tree, the forest, the carpenter or our own mind. When we meditate on it we can see the entire universe and all of its interwoven and interdependent relations in the chair. The presence of the wood reveals the presence of the tree. The presence of the leaf reveals the presence of the sun. The presence of the apple blossoms reveals the presence of the apple. Meditators can see the one in the many and the many in the one. The chair is not separate. It exists only in its interdependent relations with everything else in the universe. It is because all things are. " When we truly understand this interconnectedness, if not at every moment, but at least every day, then we will have moved ourselves well along the road towards *Tikkun Olam*. Whatever we stand before in wonder and awe, we cannot destroy. *Tikkun Olam* begins here. A rabbi who lived at the beginning of the second century, Rabbi Tarfon, once called us to accountability, (Avot 2:20-21) "The day is short; the task is great, the workers indolent, the reward bountiful and the Master insistent. You are not obligated to finish the task but neither are you free to neglect it."

Rabbi Lawrence Troster is a leading Jewish scholar, eco-theologian and activist. He is the Director of the Fellowship Program and Rabbinic Scholar-in-Residence of GreenFaith. He also co-chairs the United Nations Environment Program. Rabbi Troster addressed the concept of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) as the centerpiece for modern Jewish social justice theology.

. . . In Islam

OZGUR DOGRU

There is a big emphasis on the earth as sacred in the Koran, the sayings of the prophet and in the writings of various Islamic scholars throughout history. As Muslims we believe God is the most powerful, most gracious and most merciful being of all, the creator of everything that exists and humankind holds a very special place in his creation. In the Koran there is a verse that reads, "Surely, we created man in the best form possible. "We believe humans can go beyond the angels in terms of their capacity for being good, and some of the prophets have achieved such goodness, but this can only be accomplished through worship. This goodness does not depend on how smart you are or how skilled you are in your job or whether people acclaim or applaud you, it is attained only by worshipping God. Nothing else. In the Koran, God says to his prophets, " I acknowledge your worship of me and you are my prophet because of it." Human beings have free will and can choose to worship God and this is what gives them the capacity to reach beyond the angels.

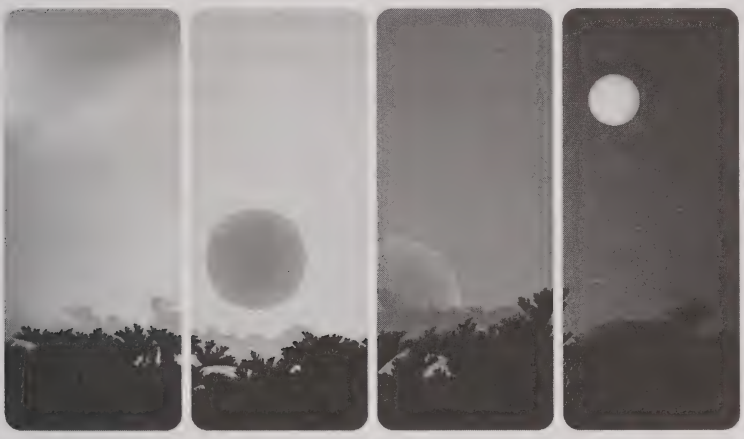
Now, if we look at the world around us, living and nonliving, it is obvious that everything is at the service of human beings. For example, the elements of the earth such as zinc, iron, and potassium— all are useful to us. If you look at the trees, rivers, mountains, plants and animals—they all benefit human beings. Plants provide us with the oxygen we need to burn our food and they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. We are continually engaged in an intimate exchange of air with plants. We have animals that provide us with food and clothing. Milk, eggs, honey—these all come from animals. And, there is the earth

itself. The planet has just the right structure for life. It is just the right place for us. If the earth were a few percent closer to the Sun than its actual location, it would be too hot for human beings. If the Earth were a few percent further from the Sun, it would be too cold. The Earth has a certain tilt—and thanks to this tilt we have temperature variations. It is a good thing we don't have only one temperature point or we would probably all go crazy since some people like it hot and some people like it cold! Day and night are the result of the Earth's rotation around the sun. It rotates at just the right speed so that we have a twenty-four-hour day. If the Earth were moving faster or slower, we could have big problems. We are dependent on the Earth. This alone makes it sacred for us.

According to Islam, the earth has at least two different faces. The first face—is the way we perceive the earth as the place where God shows his art, his works. It is a reflection of God's attributes and God's action. If we look at all the processes going on at the macro and micro levels on earth, we can see God. Through Sacred Earth we can see God and understand his attributes. God created all of nature in a delicate balance. It is our responsibility to maintain this deft balance and govern the Earth wisely.

A second face of the earth—apart from being a showcase for God's work—is that it's a place where human beings cultivate and plant now what will be harvested later. In Islam we believe where we go in the hereafter is based upon the deeds we do here and now. So, we must plant our feet on the earth and recognize what we do here matters. What we do with our 60-70-80 years of life will determine the life that lasts into infinity. When we die, we will collect the fruit of the deeds we planted while living on earth.

So, what can we do to heal Sacred Earth? I think we all agree that we have to heal the earth and protect the environment. Islam offers a few examples of how we might go about this. There is a *hadith*, or saying of the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) that reads, "God loves all who keep themselves clean." Cleanliness is considered one of God's attributes, so in



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Islam cleanliness is encouraged. If we are clean and promote cleanliness, we are already halfway where we want to go as a believer. When things aren't clean, we are responsible for cleaning them up. Cleanliness starts with us as individuals, our bodies, our homes and expands out to the environment, the earth as a whole. There is another *hadith* which states, "Waste not by excess for God loves not waste." To please God then, we must use the resources of the earth wisely. In Islam it is compulsory that we pray five times a day, and before each prayer we have to make ourselves clean. The prophet says that even if we are using water from a very wide river to wash our faces, hands and feet, we are not to waste the water. The idea is that we are to be respectful toward all of the earth's resources, all of the time. There are also some *hadiths* from the prophet about protecting trees. One *hadith* suggests that if we have a sapling, we should be certain to plant it. This is an important encouragement because to whomever plants the trees, God gives the reward of the fruit. In yet another *hadith*, whoever reclaims and cultivates dry land is rewarded by God, so long as both man and animal benefit from the act.

The Koran stresses two important ways that humans are called to demonstrate their respect for creation. There is a verse

in the Koran that encourages us to enjoy the beauty of creation. It mentions particular fruits like dates, grapes and figs. It tells us to enjoy watching the fruit ripening. In another verse we are encouraged to make good use of the fruit when it is ready, by picking and eating it. Creation is not to be used only for ourselves, however. Islam maintains that we are to give two and a half percent of our total wealth to poor people each year. We are responsible for sharing creation's resources with others. There is a *hadith* from the prophet in which he says, "One who goes to sleep when his neighbor is hungry is not one of us." This is a strong admonition. If we are going to heal the earth, we must begin by building a just and peaceful community on earth. There are a lot of examples from the prophet's life that support establishing peace among different cultures and communities.

According to Islam, the Earth is our home and we are responsible for taking care of it; all living and non-living organisms have a purpose and we are to treat them all with respect. In Islam everything is organized around the five times we pray each day and prayer provides us with spiritual motivation for healing the earth. Our prayer calms us, refreshes our souls and reminds us of God's greatness and God's forgiveness. If every one of us would use our times of prayer as reminders that God is watching us all throughout the day, there would be no problems on the earth. It would be good for the earth, physically and spiritually! We would all become healers of Sacred Earth and closer to God in the process. SJ

Ozgur Dogru, Ph.D. is a Muslim who was born and raised in Turkey. He received his undergraduate degree in physics and mathematics from Koc University in Istanbul and came to the United States in 1998 to pursue his doctoral studies at Rutgers University. He is now an Assistant Professor of Physics at Ramapo College and is affiliated with the Interfaith Dialog Center of New Jersey. Dr. Dogru is married and the proud father of a nine-month old son.

. . . In Christianity

KATHLEEN DEIGNAN

In 2002, Pope John Paul II told an audience of Vietnamese priests that creation is the original revelation, speaking clearly to us about the Creator and leading us ever more deeply into the mystery of God's love. He said, "For those who have attentive ears and unveiled eyes, creation is like a first revelation, which has its own eloquent language. It is a sacred book, whose letters are represented by the multitude of creatures present in the universe." With these remarks, John Paul echoed a long tradition that affirmed two scriptures in the Christian canon: the Bible and The Book of Creation. From the beginning we have been invited to read one in light of the other. So, creation spirituality is nothing new in Christianity. In fact, it is its very heart and soul since Christianity celebrates the mystery of the incarnation of divinity into matter—affirming creation as an unspeakable alphabet by which God spells out the inexhaustible creativity and splendor, the magic and mystery, the terrible beauty of the divine milieu. The Scripture of Creation and of the Bible are coextensive. Given the right interpretive tools, one can read the divine design from nature back to the Bible and vice versa. As John's Gospel announces a universe resplendent with divinity, the writings of St. Paul present the cosmic Christ as the epicenter of all creation, not just of human history. Irenaeus, the great second century teacher, notes that creation reveals the one who formed it; the world manifests the one who ordered it. The two books of revelation, therefore, are foundational to the Christian credo and the ways Christianity has celebrated and failed to celebrate both are at once the glory and the tragedy of our religious tradition.

A series of historical and theoretical dislocations of our beautiful creation tradition occurred over generations from our creation-centered beginnings and eventually set Christian hope heavenward to the abandonment of the Earth. Yet the under-ground stream of creation spirituality has remained deep and strong. This fountain of wisdom has sprung up again in our moment, baptizing two contemporary masters and mentors as eloquent evangelists of the gospel of creation—Thomas Berry and Thomas Merton. Each brings to new light the Christian practice of what I call "*lectio natura*," reading The Book of Nature and its urgent message for our time. The confluences in the lives of these two extraordinary American Catholic monks, priests, visionaries, and prophets are uncanny. They were born within a few months of each other, 1914-1915, one in the foothills of the Appalachians in North Carolina, the other in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Though their early lives differed, both recognized the crises dawning with the 20th century and harbored deep feelings of foreboding about the historical moment in which they were living. Both were spiritually precocious, vibrant and awake. In different monastic settings, each became a mystic, writer and teacher. Merton, the Cistercian monk and Berry, the Passionist priest, were formed by the Christian life, steeped in the scriptures and the liturgy. Ascetics in their own right and ravenous intellectuals, they sought the gems that lay beneath the encrustations of religious dogma. They plumbed the depths of the Christian well, and every other spiritual well, until they tasted the living waters of wisdom which only intensified their thirst to see what could be seen and know what could be known. Ultimately, they found divine revelation in what each came to identify as the primordial scripture, The Book of Nature.

Thomas Berry preferred not to engage in traditional God-talk but rather sought to evoke and evolve a new cosmo or geo-poetics of divine mystery. Berry read The Book of Creation in dialogue with the sciences of cosmology and ecology, as they elaborate an emergent universe of wonder and mystery. In his reading of the Book of Creation, Berry, the geologian, offers us an affirmation, a new story, a warning, a dream, a great work.

Thomas Merton was a creation mystic, the ecological prophet of the pair, whose labor to read The Book of Creation returned him to paradise here and now in the contemplative recovery of his endemic consciousness and practice. In his reading of The Book of Nature, Merton, the ecologian, leaves us an incantation, an old story, a critique of Christian practice, a prophesy, a vision, a great work.

Berry's affirmation states that the phenomenal world arises from a transphenomenal source, yet these are two aspects of one single energy. The divine, he says, is creating a world that is creating itself. The universe is the initial word of divinity still spelling itself out in endless creativity. The primordial scripture of the universe then is the only text without a context. All other scriptures are commentaries and interpretations, illuminations, explications.

Merton, the poet, might say it this way, in his own beautiful language, "There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious unity and integrity is wisdom, the mother of all. There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a font of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being. This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as *Hagia Sophia,* sent to me from the depths of the divine fecundity" ("Hagia Sophia," *Collected Poems of Thomas Merton,* 363).

Berry offers us a new telling of the cosmic creation story, drawing from science yet begging a sacred narration. He says that the universe in its full extent of space and sequence of transformations is best understood as a story. He says that our greatest need for the survival of earth and humankind in our time is for an integral reading and a sacred telling of this great story as an empowering religious narrative to guide and energize the human venture.

Merton's penetrating *lectio* of the old biblical creation story, however, is illuminating for the new scientific one because it casts

light on our sacred role in this evolutionary drama. Merton says the early chapters of Genesis are precisely a poetic revelation of God's view of the universe and God's intentions for the human. The point is that God made the world a garden in which God takes delight. God made the human and gave to the human the task of sharing in the divine care for created things. God made the human in God's own image and likeness as an artist, a worker—the gardener of paradise.

Entrusted with the earthly paradise of Eden, Adam and Eve, our mythological progenitors, were invited to be collaborators with God in "governing paradise." Their partnership was so intimate that the creator entrusted to these earthlings the naming and knowing of living things, sustaining a clear vision of the singular vestige of God in the great multiplicity of creatures. Paradise in Merton's eyes is an ontological reality, which has an epistemological challenge. This means it is our vocation, our existential labor to wake up to paradise all around us, and to do this by the therapy of contemplation.

Berry renders a severe critique of Christian teaching and of the Christian *lectio* of the Bible in particular, because he maintains it has distracted us for centuries from the primordial scripture of creation. Poorly read, explained, and understood, the Bible has given us license for our rapacious ways toward the creatures and elements we have dominated, subjugating them as objects for use and not as subjects for communion. A too narrow reading of the Christian mysteries has focused on Jesus as text, without cosmic context (something unimaginable for St. Paul and the early Christian masters), attributing all value to the human and leaving other kind to be abused at our whim. With this reading of the scripture, the universe loses its sacrality.

Merton would agree but focuses his critique on the failure of Christian formation to accentuate transformative spiritual practice over formulaic religious performance. He maintains that by stressing believing over perceiving, Christians fail to awaken the mind and heart of Christ, leaving us in the lonely isolation

of the false self. Merton points out that characteristic of this anthropocentric or human-centered consciousness is its

exclusion of the kind of wisdom that can be discovered by communion with nature, a wisdom based on love of the cosmos, which he calls "our cosmic parent." Merton taught that the practice of natural contemplation was the way to recover one's original wholeness and integrity. He proposed that in the contemplative process of remembering paradise, through reverent attentiveness and presence to nature, one can be restored to original sanity and wholeness.

Like a voice in the wilderness of our self-wrought isolation and desolation, Merton cries out for the recovery of our paradise mind as our home ground through the work of contemplative conversion. Merton says it beautifully, "Take thought, take thought of the game you have forgotten. You are a child of a great and peaceful race, an unutterable fable. You were discovered on a mild mountain. You have come out of the godlike ocean. You are holy, disarmed, signed with a chaste emblem. You are also marked with forgetfulness. Deep inside your breast, you wear the number of loss. Take thought. Do this. Do this. Recover your original name" ("The Early Legend" *Collected Poems* 757-758).

Because we do not know our true identity or name in this cosmic story, our self-centered arrogance and tremendous technical power have created a human world that is extinguishing the natural world. In a rapidly deteriorating eco-system we have brought sixty-seven million years of geological and biological evolution and flourishing to an end. Defaulting on our vocation to be the gardeners and governors of paradise, we choose to build instead a human-centered wonder-world but have created a planetary wasteland. Now the survival of Mother Earth depends on her most immature offspring and time is running out for us to re-imagine another way of being human on this Earth.

Father Thomas Berry similarly holds out a dream of re-inventing the human and inaugurating the ecozoic age, a period he calls the next season of evolution for planet Earth that will be

marked by a mutually enhancing rapport between human and other kind, guided by a new mode of presence to the subjects to be communed with on this Earth. He conjures a dream of awakening to our planetary destiny as conscious celebrants of the cosmos.

Echoing this sentiment, the poet Merton writes, "For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair. But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not. Yet, the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast away our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance" (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, 296-297).

Berry reminds us that in these initial years of the 21st century, we find ourselves in a critical moment when our religious traditions must waken again to the natural world as the primary manifestation of the divine. The very nature and purpose of the human is to experience the intimate presence of the divine that comes to us through natural phenomena. In Merton's words, "We must recover our paradise mind," so that we might restore and return to paradise.

Father Thomas Berry argues that the deep psychic changes that are needed to withdraw us from fascination with the industrial world and its deceptive gifts will take a tremendous store of psychic energy. Indeed, he says we need a new meta-religious movement to awaken our energies to do the great work of this moment. Ultimately, only our sense of the sacred will save us.

Both Berry and Merton teach us that the original scripture is creation itself in its infinite unfolding of divine creativity. Reading this book in the light of our religious scriptures will

restore our spent energies of imagination and hope. They knew so well that every creature is a word of God spelling out the glory and genius of God. In Merton's words, "Every plant that stands in the light of the sun is a saint and an outlaw. Every tree that brings forth blossoms without the command of man is powerful in the sight of God. Every star that the human has not counted is a world of sanity and perfection. Every blade of grass is an angel singing in a shower of glory" ("Atlas and the Fat Man" *Collected Poems* 690-691). And every bolt of lightning is a word of the silent one!

These Christian masters invite us to read the scripture of creation with bifocals. Just as the far-sighted reading of the ever-expanding galaxies hyphenated by light years will fill us with awe and wonder, so the near-sighted reading of our own planet's degradation will fill us with shame and regret. But caveat lector: let the reader beware—The Book of Nature is truly a Book of Revelation, at times visionary and more often now, apocalyptic. In relearning the practice of reading it, we must be prepared to behold creation in all its wonder and its woundedness, reading the spectrum of its mysteries which transform what is beheld, and likewise the beholder. In this way, may our Christian senses be healed so that we may see as if for the first time, the mystery we hold in trust for all: divinity enfleshed. And yes, crucified. And yes—please God—rising. SJ

Kathleen Deignan is a member of the Congregation of Notre Dame, a Composer in Residence with Schola Ministries and Professor of Religious Studies at Iona College, where she founded and directs the Iona Spirituality Institute. She is also a GreenFaith Fellow and member of the board of the International Thomas Merton Society. Sister Kathleen's earth ministry presents the wisdom of spiritual masters, Thomas Berry and Thomas Merton. Her books include *When the Trees Say Nothing: Thomas Merton's Writings on Nature* and *Thomas Merton: A Book of Hours*. She is currently working on a new book entitled *Thomas Berry: A Book of Days*. CDs of her contemplative music are available at www.KathleenDeignan.org or www.amazon.com.

Celebrating an Earth-Friendly Holiday Season

Holidays and Holy Days are special times when we gather with family, friends and neighbors to mark the secular and religious events we find meaningful. We assemble to pray; enjoy culinary delights and exchange gifts. We take pilgrimages, sing, dance, share joy and make peace. Whatever the spiritual tradition in which we are rooted—whether during this holiday season, we will mark *Hanukkah* (the Jewish feast of Lights), *Diwali* (the festival of lights for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains), Christmas (the birth of Christ), *Kwanzaa* (the first fruits of Africa), *Eid Al-Adha*, (the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice), *Bodhi* Day (Buddhist enlightenment) or any other joyous occasion—we can celebrate in an earth-friendly way. This is not only good for our physical well-being and that of our planet—it is an important spiritual practice when our intention is rooted in reverence for creation and/or the Creator!

In the book, *Use Less Stuff: Environmental Solutions for Who We Really Are*, Robert Lilienfeld and Dr. William Rathje set the scene for why a little bit of effort from each of us is necessary to make a difference. They write, "Imagine how much waste is produced by wrapping paper, packaging, greetings cards, and other holiday disposables. Every year between Thanksgiving and New Year's, the amount of trash we create increases roughly twenth-five percent beyond what we normally discard during the rest of the year. This translates to an extra 5 million tons, or 10 billion pounds, of waste caused by holiday celebrating." They estimate the un-recycled ribbon from just one holiday season could be used to tie a bow around the earth!

Imagine how much lighter our trash bins—and our hearts could be throughout the holidays if we would make a conscious decision to reduce waste and renew the planet. Here are

some simple suggestions for generating holiday spirit while simultaneously caring for the planet.

- Take only as much food as you can eat. Savor its goodness and be grateful for the plants and animals that provided it, as well as the cook who prepared it. Serve your dinner quests on "real" dishes—and send them home with any leftovers—packed in re-usable plastic containers and bags.
- Keep your holiday shopping simple—one thoughtful gift can be more meaningful than several random ones. Consolidate your shopping trips to reduce greenhouse emissions, save gas and reduce stress. Give the gift of yourself by sharing your time and talent. Create special memories with family and friends by giving the gift of tickets to concerts, museums or sporting events.
- Rather than purchasing expensive laminated or embossed gift wrap that is not recyclable, make your own with the colorful, recyclable paper you have lying around the house like the Sunday comics or an old subway map. Kids can use crayons and paint to decorate paper bags, creating gift wrap works of art that parents and grandparents are likely to cherish. Turn gift wrap into a useful part of your gift by presenting cookies in a flower pot or wrapping kitchen utensils in a holiday-themed dish towel. Break down gift boxes and keep them to be used on another occasion. Gently untie bows and tuck that ribbon away to be re-used!
- Be selective about sending cards. E-mails and phone calls are another way to keep in touch. Reuse the fronts of cards you receive as postcards, gift cards or ornaments.
- Save energy by putting holiday lights on timers and using smaller, lower wattage (LCD) bulbs to consume less electricity and give off less heat.
- Make your own holiday decorations, such as wreaths,

garlands and table centerpieces by using dried flowers, branches, pine cones and the like, material which is often available for the taking right in your own back yard!

- If a tree figures into your celebration, purchase a live tree that can be planted, or an artificial one that can be used year after year in order to reduce the number of trees that have to be grown for holiday harvesting. (Over 50 million "Christmas" trees are purchased in the US alone each year.)
- If you are going to a holiday party, walk if it's close to where you live, or carpool with friends. If you are hosting a holiday party, turn down your thermostat before your guests arrive since their extra body heat will most assuredly warm the room. Throw a White Elephant Party to re-distribute unwanted gifts and help them find useful lives in new homes.

By no means is this an exhaustive list of what you can do. You can generate additional practices based on your own spiritual vision and values to celebrate a healthy, happy, earth-friendly holiday season.

Excerpted and adapted from *Use Less Stuff: Environmental Solutions for Who We Really Are* by Robert Lilienfeld and William Rathje and used with kind permission from the authors. You may visit Robert Lilienfeld's website www.use-less-stuff.com

Ben's Bar Mitzvah

LINDA ALBERT

Coming down the mountain trail somewhere outside Bozeman, Montana on a Friday afternoon toward the end of June, we came upon a plant with tiny delicate green leaves casting velvet shadows onto the ground below. Each leaf was the size of a dime perhaps, and slightly heart shaped. It was a little plant tucked into the side of the mountain, overhanging the trail which led to a waterfall fed by winter snow runoffs into a reservoir below. The shadows were individual and so dark that I had to go back and look closer, wondering if they were shadows at all, or some kind of animal scat instead. I had never seen anything like them. Shadows, in my experience, are usually lighter in color, though I have never made a study of shadows in any particular way.

When I decided to look closer, I was surprised to discover a small bed of pebbles directly under the leaves, so that each pebble received its own shadow separately from each individual leaf. I presume the way the sunlight was slanting off the mountain, and the way the plant was partly tucked into the side of the rock, as well as the pebbles underneath were what accounted for this phenomenon.

I had been enjoying the hike, but cannot say I was finding anything unusual about the experience until we came upon that unique set of shadows. I had been fortunate enough in the past to hike in Idaho, Arizona and New Hampshire, and to drive through mountains in Colorado. I had seen other beautiful pine trees and rock formations and waterfalls. I had certainly attended a lot of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs in my life. I was on this trip for the sake of an old friend and to attend the Bar Mitzvah of her grandson. I had forced myself out of the momentum of my writing life and the happy inertia of being home without company after the hectic winter season in Florida.

Even so, I was perfectly happy to be in Montana once I was there. I was happy to be sharing a special time with a special friend. I was happy to see how much her children and grandchildren loved their adopted home; how much pride they took in sharing it with us and showing it off. I was happy to have the sun on my back under a cloudless blue sky and to feel my feet biting down on the gravel path in the excellent hiking shoes of the Bar Mitzvah boy's sister. I was certainly amazed and impressed that on the very morning of the Bar Mitzvah, the boy, his sister and parents, felt relaxed enough to take us on this hike. But until I saw those unique shadows, I didn't think I was experiencing anything I hadn't experienced at any other time in my life.

Like the still, small intuitive voice inside, the shadows could have been easily missed.

I don't quite know what it was about those shadows that made them stand out in my mind. There was only that one inky patch of them. I think what I loved about them was their uniqueness. The special way they stood out from everything else. The attention they called. They were tiny—like the still, small intuitive voice inside—they could have been easily missed. Nobody else seemed interested when I pointed them out, and nobody else went back to take a second look. I wish I'd had more time to study them, to take them in, but everyone else was hurrying down the trail; my friend, her sister and I were the laggards as it was.

It was a big day, with Ben's Bar Mitzvah that night. There was no time to delay. There were things yet to do, a special family dinner to prepare. The beautiful *Oneg Shabbat* would include refreshments, every cookie and cake made lovingly by Ben's mother. The Temple in Bozeman is a remodeled office building.

The Rabbi presided in short sleeves. A preppy young man sang while another played the guitar. Some of the congregation wore cowboy boots. Ben at age thirteen is 5' 10" tall—a gentle giant. He read the Torah and did a spectacular job. It was a warm and wonderful evening.

As it turned out, there were many gifts to bring back with me from that Montana weekend, sweet memories—all. One of the most unexpected and the one for which I am most grateful, is that tiny group of shadows that reminded me to wake up and become conscious—those tiny individual shadows gave that one particular mountain and that one particular Bar Mitzvah celebration its own unique and special life. SJ

Linda Albert's essays, creative fiction and non-fiction short stories and poems have appeared in many publications, including *McCalls Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *SNReview*. Linda's awards include the Olivet and Dyer-Ives Foundation poetry prizes and the Atlanta Review's International Merit Award. Visit Linda online at www.lindaalbert.net

Of Faith and Flowers

COLETTE HANLON

A lead story on the news not so long ago was referred to research that suggesting Americans rate themselves highly on issues of spirituality, but this does not always translate into established religious practice. The data caught my attention because recently I have been thinking about spirituality and religion, faith and flowers.

I have the opportunity to visit a lot of churches (more than synagogues or mosques) in different parts of the country and sometimes in other lands. Increasingly I have noted a big change in the ambience in houses of worship. In place of the live flowers and plants that used to adorn the sanctuary, there are fake flowers—expensive, perhaps, but with no life or growth evident. This replacement of natural with artificial beauty seems to indicate something about our faith these days.

I find the following definitons helpful: "faith is **what I believe** (about anything, not just about God or a High Power), theology is **why I believe** as I do, and spirituality is **how I live my belief**." Engaging me in dialogue might reveal what I believe and why I believe or disbelieve certain things about God, humanity, and the earth. Someone looking at my behavior would draw conclusions about my spirituality—how I implement or incarnate my intellectual beliefs.

This is what concerns me about fake flowers, however lovely. In the past, church members would take pride in bringing flowers from their gardens to adorn the church. The presence of the flowers around the altar gave bold witness

to the "work of human hands" and the life cycle in all of nature. Recently at a monastery of Benedictine women in Connecticut the chapel was beautifully adorned with bright autumn leaves—a symbol of gratitude to the God of all creation. In contrast, a local church had green, silk plants. These were far easier to arrange and care for, but carried no message about the dynamic quality of the spiritual life.

The pressures of our world indeed cause us to become more efficient, to choose wisely what we do with our time. However, I cannot help wondering if the failure to do the hard work of raising or buying fresh flowers is indicative of our decreasing participation in organized religion. Has our religion failed us? Have we abandoned the practice of our faith? Or have our religious bodies let us down by not offering sufficient stimulation to growth and lifelong learning in their eagerness to control the Spirit's work? Do fake flowers demonstrate a static practice of faith and consequently a decreased enthusiasm for organized religion.

What might happen now if we took the time, effort, and money to surround ourselves and our houses of worship with living creatures? Just to find out for myself, I recently placed a live plant in a chapel I often visit. I'll stay tuned to see if my faith is enlivened and draws fresh hope from the growth and change nature's flowers offer for my reflection.

Colette Hanlon is a member of the Sisters of Charity Seton Hill. She is an experienced spiritual director, teacher, chaplain and director of pastoral care. Her main interest is teaching the integration of spirituality in everyday life. She has focused on the role of holistic care in maintaining health and coping with illness and the diminishments of aging and dying.

Faith in the Corporate Wilderness

WESTINA MATTHEWS

When I, an educator by training and experience, began to work in corporate America over twenty years ago, I entered a foreign land where people wore different clothing, practiced different traditions and spoke a different language. And over these more than two decades, I have certainly had my share of wilderness experiences.

Rightsizing, downsizing, mergers, acquisitions, layoffs, outsourcing, market changes, performance reviews, budget cuts, change in leadership, extreme behavior of a supervisor, betrayals and disappointments: any one of these can tip the balance in your work life. And with that tipping comes a sense of despair and desperation. You begin to ask what will the future hold and where will you be in this future?

From the first day that I began to work professionally, I made a commitment that whenever possible, I would stop in the church located near my place of employment to light a candle, to kneel, to pray, to read in the Bible a passage of hope or inspiration. Sometimes, I just sit in the pew, sighing deeply as tears fall silently down my cheeks.

Because I work in management, I live in a world of uncertainty—especially during these economic times. One particularly tough morning on my way to work, I stopped in church to light a candle. I was drawn to the small chapel in the back where I slipped onto one of the folding chairs, facing a little altar. I could not think of a prayer or a scripture passage to give me hope. Usually at times like this, I would recite just one word, "Help." On this day, even that one word seemed insufficient.

I had just laid off everyone on my team except my assistant—terminations not based on performance but rather on the company's need to downsize. I had watched friends and colleagues lose their jobs or decide to take voluntary severance

packages as the company struggled to survive. How could there be a God BIG enough to overcome these circumstance?

Sitting in the chapel, I inhaled deeply, desperately praying for God to intervene. As I slowly exhaled, I suddenly remembered Romans 8:26 where we are reminded that "with sighs too deep for words" the Spirit makes intercessions for us.

Through the tears in my eyes, I looked up and for the very first noticed high up in the ceiling a beautifully carved wooden statue of Jesus Christ on a cross. Gazing at the cross began to restore my hope and courage to continue on my wilderness experience.

Have you—like me—ever felt lost in the wilderness? Have you found yourself in spiritual stillness . . . not lost but searching, listening deep within for God's calling? Have you ever felt so lost in the wilderness that you hoped and prayed you were only a visitor and were not destined to remain? Have you ever begun to question how there could be a God BIG enough to pull you out of your personal circumstances? Have you ever found yourself overwhelmed by the bewildering vastness of an unknown terrain, and overcome by howling winds in the trackless wasteland at the bottom of your soul?

During such times, prayers seem to fall on deaf ears. We wonder if God hears us as we cry out in anguish. Does He taste our tears as we grieve over our disappointments and losses? Where is God in the corporate wilderness? How does one move from desperation to transformation?

Take heart. For just as there was a purpose for our Lord's sojourn in the wilderness, there is a purpose for us all. "Hear my teaching, O my people, Incline your ears to the words of my mouth," writes the Psalmist in Psalm 78:1.

Yes, there is a purpose for our time in the wilderness. The purpose is forgiveness and of reconciliation.

One of my favorite prayers is: "Father, forgive me for expecting of others that which one can only expect in the Divine." At work or at home, do you expect others to be divinely perfect?

Do you expect yourself to be divinely perfect? God does not require us to be perfect. God asks us only to be perfectly human.

Find comfort in the knowledge that only God is BIG enough to forgive the one who needs to be forgiven; and only God is BIG enough to help the one to forgive who needs to forgive. God's love reigns eternal; forgiveness is the key; reconciliation is the goal; and love is always, always, always the answer. As we begin to forgive and are forgiven, we then have an opportunity to reconcile ourselves with God and with one another, particularly in the workplace and especially during these difficult times.

My prayer for you today is that you will be inspired, you will yield not unto temptation, but will find your way out of isolation, confusion, and disorientation; and move toward the light of forgiveness and reconciliation. Transformation comes from within. Have faith in the corporate wilderness and you will find your way to God's fullness of life. SJ

Westina Matthews, Ph.D. is a retreat leader, public speaker, and spiritual director whose practice fosters contemplative living through "holy listening." She has written a series of poignant spiritual books based on the parable of the mustard seed. Westina recently retired from her position as a corporate executive.

Where Is the Gift?

CAROLYN FOOTE EDELMANN

Life, lately, resembles
The Gods Must Be Crazy.
In that tragi-comic film,
the landing of a Coke
bottle among aborigines
alters everyone's lives. The
only way to explain these
bizarre happenings was to
decide the gods were crazy.
Greeks saw their gods as
careless, even selfish; at best,
deities with warped senses
of humor. I have envied
agnostic friends, who merrily
do not expect life to make
sense.

Our own 'falling Coke bottle' could be anything from the Fall of the House of Finance to the death of a recent rock star. Our ruby tomatoes, the pride of New Jersey, are threatened by late wilt which will effect farmers, shippers and sellers, chefs and home cooks—to say nothing of our taste buds. My favorite hardware store, in a nearby small town, is compromised since its nice proprietor embezzled funds due to family illness.

A handful of words describes the question I have come to use as an antidote in these situations, especially in the 21st century: No matter what, where is the gift?

Answering this question involves a two-fold process. First, know the gift is there. Then actively seek it. Like knights of Arthurian times, set out in quest of boons.

Experience has taught me, "to everything there is [not only] a season" but also a purpose. Meaning extends far beyond our daily lives. Our mission, should we so choose, is to discover and fulfill it.

It is not enough to wish, however. Active expectation is essential. Since founding Transition Consulting in Bucks County in 1983, I have been increasingly shown that the Universe is eager to deliver blessings. However,

it requires specificity and a welcoming attitude. Gifts, like seeds, are more likely to fall on tilled and ready fields.

Tonight, "Where is the gift?" proved helpful when a faraway friend called to describe someone's torrent of dire news. Although neither my friend nor I can alter her neighbor's reality, together we aligned in acknowledging (1) there are gifts beyond imagining in this situation; (2) the individual can be shown her blessings clearly, swiftly and memorably. Our alignment moved us from powerlessness to cooperation with the Universe.

"Where is the gift?" modality works in small matters. One morning this week, a laggard kitchen light suddenly went on as I was dashing out of my apartment. Remembering gifts, I returned to the kitchen. Hand on the light switch, I realized that the dishwasher had not turned itself off. Fire or flood—I'll never know which-—was averted by that light's odd behavior.

"Where is the gift?" also works in large matters. Recently, my trusty thirteen-year-old car was deemed "unfit to drive." The demise of the "back tracking bar" (new phrase) meant the end of vehicular partnership. It seemed I had nowhere to turn. Expecting gifts, however, miracles immediately unfolded. Friends at home and at work vied to drive me to and fro. A fellow writer, shopping nearby, called and insisted, "You must be out of things—what do you

Gifts, like seeds, are more likely to fall on tilled and ready fields.

need?" Over in Illinois, my younger sister and her son found a solid used Buick at a dealer they knew and trusted. On a marathon drive, they brought this silver steed to my door. I named it "Excalibur," honoring King Arthur's motto, "Right Makes Might."

With the collapse of my old car, I was given not only this protective new one, but also joyous memories with my sister and nephew. They were granted quality time alone on the drive, all too rare in the wake of my sister's new widowhood. My broken car was donated to the American Kidney Foundation, a sentimental gesture remembering my once-husband, a Mayo Clinic-trained urologist.

"Where is the gift?" can work whenever we see or hear an ambulance. By visualizing gifts conveyed to helpers and the helped, on wheels and in the hospital, we are calling forth grace, by whatever name. And we are blessed in the giving.

Yes, colleagues and friends tease, call me "Pollyanna." Yet they have come to count on my "Where is the gift?" In a recent business meeting, I listened amazed as the leader directed all present to adopt my approach of "Where is the gift?"

I've lived this motto the hard way, trying to extricate daughters and self from my marriage to a man who had become alcoholic. The dearest man in all the world switched from Jekyll to Hyde. The three of us took every opportunity to be coached by Certified Alcoholism Counselors, in Alanon, Alateen, and Alcoholics Anonymous ("You cannot expect your father to attend, if you won't. And nobody gets to wear a sign that says, 'Just looking'...") Codependents Anonymous came along later. All took their emotional toll, to be sure, while informing and healing. Yes, "our alcoholic" became sober. No, he did not turn back into the splendid

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human I had married.

However, over the decades since, all three of us have led others to counselors, meetings, catalytic books and sobriety. For some, it was a spouse. For others, children. Often, a parent. Many still write their thanks. Gifts…

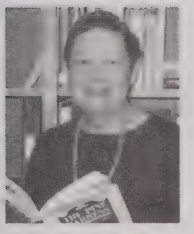
The recent financial plunge is teaching people to rediscover family, the pleasure of reading and telling of stories, the importance of buying local, helping others. "Staycations" are coming into vogue; so more people will come to realize the spectacular natural wonders of under-appreciated New Jersey. Print newspapers are doing badly, so I have been charged by The Packet Publications to begin and maintain *NJ WILD*, a nature blog, to celebrate my state's

open space, and urge its preservation. I have yet to find the gift in the tomato blight, or in the closing of the multi-generational hardware store. But I am confident I will. At the simplest level, although a storm prevents my kayaking now, I can instead write these musing.

The "Where is the gift?" paradigm comes into play in still other ways. Consider that our Earth bodies are chariots of the soul. We are responsible, not only to protect but also to create gifts for that soul-passenger. Shopping at farmers' markets feeds both body and soul, with beauty as well as nutrition, while conveying direct gifts to the growers, tenders and sellers. Preparing fresh foods lovingly and lighting candles for meals nourishes the soul as well as cells. Taking a walk or paddle along the canal, with eyes wide open, collects nature's soul gifts. Tending and preserving nature in your region, means that souls not only of today but also of future generations will be gifted.

In a book on the growers of Beaujolais wines, I read my certainty echoed in the words from the mouth of a *vigneron*: "When it rained, that meant we might find mushrooms."

A bonus to living "Where is the gift?" The certainty there is a gift in everything calls positive forces into play. Expecting gifts allows them to appear.



Carolyn Foote Edelmann serves as Arts & Education Associate at D&R Greenway Land Trust, Princeton, NJ. She launched and maintains a nature blog for *The Packet Publications*, titled *NJ Wild*. Carolyn is the author of two collections of poetry. She writes and photographs for several regional newspapers.

CONNECT—

Join our new Online Community!

Fellowship in Prayer maintains that peace in our world and hope for the future resides in a global community of prayer. When you join our Online Community you will be able to connect with others to share spiritual practices within and across religious traditions as a path to more effective and compassionate social action.

To access the FIP Online Community visit www.fellowshipinprayer.org

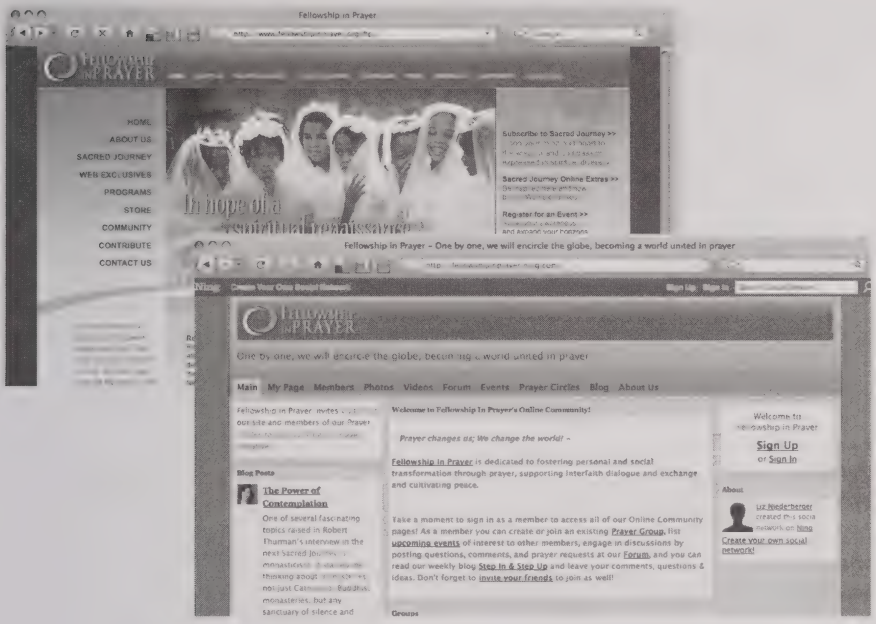
Using the right navagation bar, click "Join Online Community." Complete your member profile and you wil be able to join an existing prayer circle or create one of your own, participate in One-in-Prayer, comment on our new weekly Blog—Step In & Step Up, check our events calendar, and post your own events.

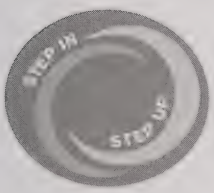
Please be sure to invite your family and friends!

Become One-In-Prayer!

Check the Fellowship in Prayer home page where a new One-In Prayer request will be posted each week, highlighting a particular social issue or community in need. Every day at noon, wherever you may be in the world, you are invited to pause for one minute of prayer for this special request. We know there is unique power in collectively focusing our spiritual attention and energy in this way.

To make it even easier for you to participate when you join Fellowship in Prayer's Online Community, you can elect to receive One-in-Prayer weekly email updates.





Step In & Step Up

Our New Weekly Blog

DEEANN WEIR

Be sure to read Fellowship in Prayer's new blog authored by DeeAnn Weir. Join her in reflecting on the interface between spiritual practice and deep personal or social transformation. Consider the profound wisdom rooted in religious diversity.

DeeAnn will be sharing inspiration gleaned from reading Sacred Journey, from the depth and breadth of her own spiritual practice, from pressing social issues and—once you join the conversation—your questions and comments.

Step In to spiritual awareness and **Step Up** to meet today's challenges!

Contrast and Unity

PATTY SMITHERMAN

As I lean against the rough bark of the large tree,
A cool breeze slips past my face
Creating a perfect contrast of the silky, fluid and invisible
With the rigid, rough and perceptible.

I am upright but not rigid.
I can move but not flow.
I am in the middle of the continuum.
All natural, all nature,
All God.

God in the breeze, in the tree, in me
A unity of contrasts.

Patty Smitherman, formerly a Presbyterian Elder, Deacon and teacher, is now a business owner. She delights in being a grandmother, a hiker and pilgrim (The Camino de Santiago, Spain).

Ismael* and God

KIERSTA L. RECKTENWALD

Ismael tasted of the fruit of wisdom—
Being right, he saw the face of God;
Being true, he gave his life to others;
Being loved, he lived a life of joy,
And being joyous, he came to know of Truth.

*Son of Imam Jaffer VI

Kiersta Recktenwald was born and currently resides in Farmington, ME. She was raised in Japan. She is a part-time college student interested in Philosophy and Psychology.

The Seas of Arizona

DONALD KOOZER

The Autumn afternoons began to soften.
I walked along the crowded sidewalks
Of humanity, and all that I saw in their
Eyes was in my eyes. And I was not
Divided from the magnetic current
Of their sorrow. But when I saw that
The stream of suffering held me,
The fist in my body opened and
The sea lifted me up above their heads,
And I was awakened into the forgotten
Fields. Harmony reigned in the Earth
And sky. And the Mystery emerged
Out of the sea in an aura of peace
And entered my heart.

Donald Koozer's poems and short stories have been published in a variety of literary journals. A volume of his poetry is due to be published by Bellowing Ark Press in late spring of 2010. He currently lives in Arizona with his wife and author, Donis Casey.

Tribute to a "Weed"

ROBERT O'ROURKE

There is a story I have heard of a man who tried everything to "control" dandelions growing in his yard of carefully groomed Bluegrass. His compulsion was to apply every chemical available in the hardware store. To no avail! The "weeds" as he called them prevailed. Finally he appealed to the county agent for advice. He was advised there was nothing left to do but "learn to love them."

I have a neighbor who has not learned to love dandelions. I do! At any rate, not long ago he left home for a few days. During his absence a lone dandelion seed parachuted onto his paved driveway and bounced along until it discovered a single small crack and, much like Tennyson's flower in the crannied wall, it fastened its roots in a bit of soil in that crevice. In a short time the little seed became a plant that sent out emerald green leaves, then, to fulfill its purpose on Earth, a delicate, delightful yellow flower, radiant as a sunbeam, burst forth in bloom. The flash of yellow caught my eye as would a lonely star on a dark night.

I have always enjoyed sunny dandelions and watching their evolutionary journey from brown seed to green—green-to-gold and finally a silver globe of gossamer seeds ready to take flight with each wandering breeze. Fascinating! A miracle of creation. Not so my neighbor. I do believe he spotted that tiny flower a block away and, in minutes, had sprayed it with a concoction of toxic poison. The next day there was nothing left of that spot of green and gold except a brown, crumpled clump, unrecognizable as a once living thing, soon to be scraped off and trashed.

I feel sad as if a little bit of sunshine has left the Earth, but I have learned that nature has a way of coming on—coming back. Persistently. The folklore of Russia confirms my belief. Russians hold to the notion that were the Earth covered with cement, somewhere a blade of grass would grow. Why not a Dandy-little-lion?

Longtime subscribers might recognize the name Robert O'Rourke from the Rock Ritual series which appeared in this journal in the early '90s. He is writing again and we're delighted to have him back.

Deconstructing God

MIRIAM THERESE MACGILLIS

Over the last thirty years, without any forethought, I have been deconstructing my images of God. My early mind and imagination were shaped in pre-Vatican II Catholicism and my images of God were ancient, clear, strong and beloved. Deconstructing God has been humbling.

Sandra Schneider has aptly described my sacred images of the Trinity as "two men and a bird." The central stained glass window in my parish church depicted a warm, elderly, white-haired man, a younger Jesus with a scepter and a beautiful dove above them. Interestingly enough the two men are placing a crown on the head of Mary kneeling before them.

The image is indelible in my mind. This clarity and assurance about the nature of God gave form, assurance, meaning, and beauty to my life. I think this image also shaped my family, friends, schoolmates and the world of American Catholicism.

During Vatican II, without anyone realizing it, we began taking apart, dismantling, and examining all those images for what is beyond image. I know I have moved through this process. It has been very difficult. There were no guides. I just kept slowly dismantling my images of God. As a result, I do not have specific images. So now I have to try to imagine ways to approach the Ineffable Mystery, the Unknowable, the Holy One.

One of the images I have worked with is a pinpoint. The universe started with a very small area the size of a pea—according to Einstein. I picture that as a black dot in the middle of a white field. I can only sense what

is behind the white field and the black dot. There is no way to know the Unknowable. I am content with that. I don't need anything more. The reason I have faith in this Mystery is that, on this side of the black dot, the universe is the testament to it. In other words, what I have come to understand as the universe, the earth and all its relationships is miracle enough for me to trust what is behind the black dot. I do not need to know any more. This has opened a door of faith for me that is different from that of my earlier life.

In the past, my faith was based on the history of the Hebrew people, the life of Jesus and the historical church. This is how I perceived truth. My tradition of truth was the "inspired" story of the people, events, and circumstances recorded in the story of humanity after the Fall from grace. It is the story of hundreds of thousands of human beings living their lives while believing in a Divine being who guided their personal and collective destiny.

This is the legacy I have been given. Now I understand this story as the laying down of an inner spiritual legacy developed through lives of thousands of human beings who shaped their lives out of this story and created insights, values and spiritual qualities as part of an ongoing developmental process of consciousness.

This is my Catholic legacy. It is the repository on which I stand in the present moment, using its energy to keep myself going. This faith tradition

> I fear that what is happening to our planet is . . . so far gone that we won't recover.

has become a single seamless fabric behind my understanding of the universe, a gift upon which my consciousness can continue to expand. So it is a connection, an endowment, a legacy.

In my darker moments I fear that what is happening to our planet is so bad, so far gone that we won't recover. When I feel my grief and anger, when I let myself experience the pain of the world, it is this faith that sustains me. It enables me to keep going, to die to my small self and resurrect a new aspect of my deeper self. Crisis becomes a condition for opening me up. If I could not be faithful to my life's call through these dark times, I would abandon the whole thing. When I get tired or frustrated or overwhelmed by the feelings that it is too late, or that I ought to get on with another life and abandon this crazy path, it is my faith that keeps me going.

There is nothing else to do. It is a sense of a calling, of unfolding the meaning of one's life.

My relationship with the Mystery is in my prayer. I just imagine the field with the black dot and I'm in front of it. I say to it, "I believe, work through me, use me." I do believe the yearning of my heart is heard and accepted. I cannot be in this gorgeous universe and assume that it is random. This is not a possibility for me. I want to align myself with the good, with its purpose, rather than seek some sort of intervention or confirmation. Life is enough. This moment is enough. Sunlight, birdsong is enough.

Miriam Therese MacGillis is a member of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, NJ. She lives and works at Genesis Farm, which she cofounded in 1980 with the sponsorship of her congregation. We are happy to announce that Miriam MacGillis will be a workshop presenter at our 2010 conference. Essay excerpted from *What Does God Look Like in an Expanding Universe?* and is used with permission. © ImagoEarth Publishing.

A Book of Hours: At Prayer with Thomas Merton

BY KATHLEEN DEIGNAN, CND (Artist, Composer, Conductor)

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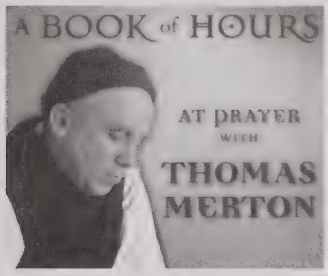

A Book of Hours: At Prayer with Thomas Merton is an audio breviary that puts to music select readings, psalms and poems from this great spiritual master. Fourteen prayers, each about eleven minutes in length, can be used to begin and end each day. Jonathan Montaldo of the Merton Institute for Contemplative Living and Paul Avgerinos of Studio Unicorn join Kathleen Deignan in guiding listeners to a place of contemplative presence.

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To learn more about Sister Kathleen's music and ministry, visit Schola Ministries, www.scholaministries.org.

Four Seasons

GUNILLA NORRIS

A whole year in the garden, a whole year in my life, working the soil. I labor with my small self, struggle with all its engagements, opinions, and doings. Insights arise when I dig and weed in my life. They may be small and only relevant to me. That is the chance I take, a chance we all must take. It matters that we take it, for we are more alike than we are different. We have basic needs for food and shelter. We also have a profound need for meaning. Is it not our basic work as persons to make of our lives a garden of meaning, a garden whose fruits we can share?

We do not do this alone. All along, the soil is there, perennial and quiet. It is mute unless we consciously lean our ears toward it and try to hear. It is from the earth itself that we have evolved. We are made of it and express it. The words humus, human and humility are deeply connected. We are soil. Our beings express the earth and contribute to it. Now, unless we listen deeply, we may destroy what sustains us. It is crucial that we feel that deep, intrinsic connection.

Anytime we make a garden, even a tiny one, we are in the work of remembering. Working the soil, cultivating our inner ground, we have a chance to appreciate and praise the great gift of life and the earth that sustains us. We are held by something so beyond our ken and so essentially unknowable. We call it God though no word can name it. Humming through us, through the ground, through all things, it asks us to be particular, to be living expressions, to be sons and daughters of earth and to care for life itself. It asks us to be fruitful—to tend the garden, to protect the garden, to share the garden, to be the garden.

Gunilla Norris has been a psychotherapist in private practice for more than thirty years and feels privileged to accompany others on their journeys of healing and growth. Excerpted from *A Mystic Garden* and used with permission from Blue Bridge Books, an imprint of United Tribes Media, Inc. www.bluebridgebooks.com

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